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ABSTRACT

Part of a broader inquiry into "Investigative Exposure in the Nineteenth Century: The Journalistic Heritage of the Muckrakers," this study traces the evolving reportorial techniques and literary style that gave journalism its form--a form combining strengths and flaws, freedom and inhibitions. Before nineteenth century police court reporting was born, news writers and literary essayists alike had discovered that readers savored light, bright, shocking, and sordid news. The wisdon that crime, wars, fires, and assorted sins drew more popular attention than a "Tatler" treatise on tragedy was confirmed when Bow Street police court reports were credited with tripling a London newspaper's circulation. Reporters like John Wright of London, Thomas Gill of Boston, and Dennis Corcoran of New Orleans created useful models for varied treatments of formal courtroom sources. Their methods of transforming formal testimony from rigid question-answer interrogations into narrative scenes expanded the boundaries for future reporting and advanced the awareness that reporters would find their stylistic heritage in literature, not in the business ledger or the legal brief. (Author/RB)

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Sensational Roots: The Police Court Heritage

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"The reason we have newspapers at all, in the modern sense of the term," wrote sociologist Robert E. Park, "is because about 100 years ago, in 1835 to be exact, a few newspaper publishers in New York City and in London discovered (1) that most human beings, if they could read at all, found it easier to read news than editorial opinion and (2) that the common man would rather be entertained than edified."[1]

Perhaps it can be agreed that newspapers, "in the modern sense," were first nourished by those dual discoveries in 1835—even while endless controversies swirl around other aspects of Park's two assertions. But 1835 is much too exact and too late from the viewpoint of this study of police court reporting. (The paper is part of a broader inquiry into the development of reporting techniques and literary style which evolved into the investigative exposures called muckraking.) At least in 1820 and probably before 1700, the wicked wisdom had spread widely in literary and journalistic cirdes. The common reader clearly craved news, preferably news of wonders and marvels, from beached whales to two-headed babies, over learned essays when ever the entertainment-minded reader was

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given a choice. Ben Jonson, dead 200 years before Park's penny publishers discovered human nature, registered elitist disgust with the popular preference for news and entertainment over editorials and edification.[2] In all fairness, Park, too, knew that 1835 marked only the then most successful exploitation of the wicked wisdom. Further-reaching observations, however, have avoided pinning the popular phenomenon to a point in time; Edwin Emery, in the most widely-read general history of American journalism, charted waves of sensationalism cresting as new, broader audiences were reached in 1620, 1833, the 1890s and 1920.[3]

Sensationalism surely crested from time to time, but it's doubtful that the common reader wavered in his preference for light, bright, shocking or sordid news. Did even Tatler and Spectator readers rush for Addison's treatises on tragedy, or the more mundane follies of Sir Roger de Coverly? Or did Steele's early Eighteenth Century campaigns against sharpers and swindlers, his street-corner encounter with a public whore, and other exposures of vice stir more coffee-house conversation? Whatever motivated the readers of their essays, Addison seemed sure, in 1709, that the common news-writers, if not the uncommon essayists, thrived on sensation.

In wartime, he wrote in mock-heroic praise, the news-writers took more towns and fought more battles

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than the soldiers; in peacetime, Addison feared, they would return to the days "when they could not furnish out a single paper of news, without lighting up a comet in Germany or a fire in Moscow."[4] A news-letter was incomplete "without a paragraph on an earthquake." One editor specialized in whales, reporting three in the river Thames within months, while Ichabod Dawks "got himself a reputation from plagues and famines, by which, in those days, he destroyed as great multitudes as he had lately done by the sword."[5] Treating his complaint in a less satirical mood, Addison once suggested that, to a foreigner reading British news sheets, "What a nation of Monsters must we appear."[6]

The great "spectator" also wondered seriously about his countrymen's "general thirst after news," and advised them to explore British history instead of dwelling on every current curiosity.[7] A letter to "Mr. Spectator" confirmed the complaint.

> "...Men who frequent Coffee-houses, and delight in News, are pleased with every thing that is Matter of Fact, so it be what they have not heard before. .... In short, they have a Relish for every thing that is News, let the matter of it be what it will; or to speak more properly, they are Men of a Voracious Appetite, but no Taste.[8]

The letter, proposing to exploit this condition with a daily newspaper, referred to the war as "the great Fountain of News," and planned, with it "very near being dried up," to satisfy the "inextinguishable Thirst"

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for news. The would-be editor had concluded that readers "are as pleased to hear of a Pyebald horse that is stray'd out of a field" as of troops engaged in battle.[9]

Another discovery about the nature of news was also made early by both essayists and popular newswriters. When Addison and Steele drew their observant pictures of daily life, exposure of abuses and corrective criticism outweighed praise. The Spectator set out, "To correct the vices, ridicule the follies, and dissipate the ignorance" of the day.[10] It failed, somehow, to accentuate the positive. The Grub-Street Journal started 20 years later and fell into the same pattern. The inaugural credo announced the intention of balancing praise and criticism; a subsequent evaluation of the Journal's pages proved that "exposure and censure far outweigh praise."[11] To critics who cried "scandal," the Grub-Street writer replied that the Journal "attacks only pickpockets and corruptors of taste and morals."[12]

What the periodical essayists suspected in the 1700s, Benjamin Harris had sensed in 1690 and Ned Ward overtly practiced by 1699. It is hard to overestimate the more-than-symbolic significance of the first American newspaper, Harris' Publick Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestick, closing after a single issue because it mixed sex, violence and sensational exposures

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of governmental misconduct.

What Harris might have done in the way of early American muckraking is matter for speculation; what Ward did in his monthly London Spy is subject to examination. As the anthologists put it, his publication "caught fire at once," thanks to anecdotal accounts of observational tours to prisons, asylums and other Hogarthian settings.[13] Ward had more in common with "the twentieth-century muckrakers," they added, "than with the more solid literary figures of eighteenth-century journalism."

Ward solved the problem of narrative viewpoint by dragging a friend along on his tours among London's other half. He could create dialogue by quoting his own conversations with his companion, as they observed and reacted to Bedlam and Bridewell. Informal interviews, or brief conversations, with inmates were dotted with Ward's opinions--some sympathetic, some frivolously insensitive.

He described prison gates, window grates, walkways and chambers, and he appealed to the readers' senses. "A surly bull-necked fellow" was seen thumping lazily at a wooden anvil; "a ghastly skeleton" stood peeping through the iron grates.[14] The tourists followed their noses to the women's section, where the occupants "smelled as frowzily as so many goats in a Welsh gentleman's stable, or rather a litter of pis-tail children

under the care of a parish nurse." If sexual inhibitions would constrain other journalists for centuries to come, Ward could report this dialogue:

> "Pray, sir," says one of them. "You look very wistfully at us. What do you think of us?"
> "Why, truly," said I, "I think you have done something to deserve this punishment, or else you would not be here."
> "If you'll believe me without blushing, I'll tell you the truth. I happened to live with an old rogue of a haberdasher, and when my mistress was out of the way, he used to tickle my lips with a pen feather. At last she caught us and had me before Justice Overdoe, who committed me hither, where I have had more lashes of my back than ever my belly deserved."
> "Don't believe her, master," cries another. "She's as arrant a strumpet as ever earned her living at twopence a bout, and was committed hither for lying so long on her back that her rump grew to the bedclothes till she could not rise again."[15]

The long line of prison, asylum and slum exposures in American journalism probably owes less to Ward than to the more respectable tours conducted by Charles Dickens. But, wherever it began, a constant stream of similar reportage flows through the Nineteenth and into the Twentieth Century, from Charles Edward Russell's muckraking of church-owned tenements in 1908 to television documentary tours in the 1960s. This current is less apparent, however, than the police court reporting which quickly became an institutionalized news beat—a regular reportorial assignment rather than an unscheduled tour.

Just as the literary essayists decried the thirst for sensational revelations and Ned Ward satisfied it,

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the proprietors of the London Evening Herald could hardly have misunderstood the tripling of their circulation upon the advent of the Bow Street police court reports by John Wight in 1820.[16] Not that the intervening years were uninstructive; in 1801, another alarmed essayist, Fisher Ames, complained that "Extraordinary events multiply upon us surprisingly," and asked, "Is the history of Newgate the only one worth reading?" Printers were competing, Ames said, to see "who shall have the most wonders, and the strangest and most horrible crimes... ."[17] And, certainly, as Park suggested, this ripening wisdom of journalistic life, bolstered by Wight's Bow Street success, became even more compelling as the penny press competed for new readers in the 1830s.

"The vulgar, degrading police reports" were blamed by a Boston sixpenny paper for the quick success of its cheap rival, the Boston Morning Post.[18] In America's fourth largest city, cosmopolitan New Orleans, the Bow Street style entertained and perhaps even edified the readers of the Picayune. The reporters in London, Boston and New Orleans drew heavily on their literary heritage to recreate courtroom testimony as narrative stories. Although historian Frank Luther Mott contended that their facetious court reporting died an early death, contrary evidence suggests that Wight and others provided reportorial models that would be imitated

for years and influential for generations.

Police court coverage lacked a key ingredient of muckraking--the reporter did not pursue an independent, fact-gathering investigation. But, while he normally limited his reporting to information available in the courtroom, the writer widely explored the narrative possibilities. These pioneers not only made dramatic reconstructions of formal testimony, but described the physical appearance of the participants, the sounds of their voices and the original scenes of their misadventures. At the heart of this anecdotal reportage was the clear realization that police court news deserved more than the dry factual recitations used in listing the arrivals and departures of ships and cargoes.

The court reporters, well in advance of the local colorists and the novel-writing realists, were "holding the mirror up to nature," as the Picayune's Dennis Corcoran so unoriginally proclaimed.[19] Wight compared his reports to fiction, but with the difference that, "The dramatis personae are actual existences, and the scenes real occurences."[20] If their characters often resembled the ill-begotten heroes of picaresque novels or farcical figures from Shakespearean comedy, it simply proved that truth could be as sensational as fiction and that reality could parody drama.

The police court reports of Wight and the rest ran the gamut from perfunctory paragraphs to elaborate

essays on subjects suggested by a particular criminal case. The paragraph might prove the most common form if a scholar chose to count items; it is well represented by this example from Thomas Gill of the Boston Morning Post:

> POLICE COURT--John Daress, a red-haired blacksmith, was fined $3.00 and costs, for hammering the life half out of James Rice, a bald-headed carpenter. Rice undertook to lay a new floor in Daress's cellar, but did not do it to his satisfaction. Rice said, "It was laid well enough for a d--n Paddy." Whereupon Daress gave him a tremendous Paddy-whack in the eye, and spilt him entirely down upon the new flooring. Moral to be deduced from this case: --It is not healthy to curse a red-haired man to his face.[21]

The concluding "moral" was neither unusual nor obligatory in the early police paragraphs. But the characterizing descriptions, the pertinent quotation and the dramatic physical action typify such reporting.

The longer reports shunned the summarylead sentence that disclosed Daress's fine, charge and victim before recreating the dramatic incident. Less direct, they found room for broad and varied treatment of characterizing details--often describing their police personae from head to toe, from their speech to their way of walking. Wight portrayed an old man, who went strolling with his breeches slung over his shoulder, as "a short, dumpy, sunburnt, orange and purple-faced man—topped with a clean white night cap."[22] The old fellow testified that hewas too hot, "twinkling his little deep-set French-grey eyes, and sending forth a

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long drawn sultry sigh."

Corcoran presented a disputing Dutchman and a painter, both with stereotyped and individual traits: "a low, chubby, cabbage-headed Dutchman and a thin, tall, attenuated man in a seedy black coat, pants to match, and a well-brushed faded silk hat."[23] He also introduced a "little Frenchman, whose hair stood on end a la Jackson," an Irishman named Con O'Donnell who looked "like a badly bound, much-worn edition of the Connecticut blue laws," and the likes of Thomas Cunniff, who received the full burlesque treatment.[24]

> He looked lazy and loaferish, and had all the appearance of one who sleeps in the market at night and patronizes the catfish hotel by day. The confused state of his hair showed that he had an utter abhorrence of "slick" soap locks, and his beard looked as if it were rubbed off by a pumice stone... . His eyes were like two small golden fish in a basin of muddy water; his proboscis turned up like the toe of a Chinese shoe, and his mouth was like the opening of a Yankee's saddle bags.[25]

Gill's mid-1830s Bostonians, like Corcoran's delta characters of the 1840s, were described in comic detail ranging from a single pertinent trait to a cataloguing spray of adjectives. Like the revealing red hair of the paddy-whacking Daress, the fact that John Jellison was a "heavy-built six-footer" and Catharine Brady stood "five feet nothing in high-heeled bootees" set up the ensuing scene; Mrs. Brady flew through the air and leaped at Jellison to recover her shawl from high inside his hat.[26] But a fuller portrait was required

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when sailor William Weevis returned from sea to discover, and eventually strike, an unfaithful wife. Weevis, according to Gill, was a sailor in his every aspect.

> (He) celebrates the termination of each successive voyage in a flowing can of grog; he is happy, too, in a luxuriant--ay, magnificent growth of whiskers, which umbrageously envelop his cheeks, and meet under his chin, where they bush out in every direction, like dark shrubbery round the mouth of a cavern. ...each looked like nothing under the sun, save an enormous swab, fitted only for cleansing the decks of a line-of-battle ship.[27]

Gill went on to honor each piece of the sailor's apparel--shirt, jacket, trousers and belt--and then dramatized Weevis' rolling walk in a nautical metaphor that had him navigating the city and occupying both sides of the way, "by constantly tacking and running foul of everything he meets or overtakes." The story noted the texture of his hair, the tone of his complexion, and the thrust of a brow worthy of "Cooper in Othello." The sailor's color was "a shade darker than an eminent politician's, but not so black as said politician's presidential prospects."[28]

Even when so broadly burlesqued, however, physical descriptions did not necessarily dominate characterization in the court reports. While reporters exercised their powers of observation at the expense of Cunniff, Weevis and the untrousered old man, their primary source of information was testimony, the words of these same sinners and sailors, spoken from the witness stand. Like the local colorists who gained prominence

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after the Civil War, the court reporters attempted to record the dialects spoken by criminal defendants and finger-pointing witnesses. Dialect stereotyped more than it individualized the speakers, but it helped advance the reports beyond the confines of a stenographic version of formal testimony. Among its contributions, dialect apparently permitted greater freedom in reporting impolite language.

Corcoran's cabbage-headed Dutchman called the arrogant portrait painter "a tam shon of a pitch," and punctuated his speeches with "Got tam."[29] The Boston Post weaseled with ellipsis, yet clearly revealed that Foster, after Robertson called him a "--------- old leather-head," "called him a ---------- (no great compliment to his mother)."[30] When Weevis confronted his straying wife, he warned that she had worn the pants long enough, "and I may be totally d------- if you wear 'em any longer."[31]

Bow Street's Wight, or perhaps his superior, also preferred ellipsis when the curses were well-enunciated in English, but permitted foreign epithets without deletion. One Jacques Breton, a man "inthe practice of taking a half-gill of old sherry in a goblet of pure spring water, at the Cannon Tavern," shouted, "Ahah! sacre!" before grabbing a heavy cue from a bagatelle board and giving Elias Simmons a "thundering thwack" on the bare head and dropping him "prostrate among the spittonns."[32] A few more "ahahs" and "voilas" later,

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Breton tried to explain, "I vas ver mush vex at Monsieur...vat you call d--n angry." Admittedly, he was angry enough to hit Simmons, but not enough "to murder von littel--von vara littel fly!"[33]

Dutchmen, Frenchmen (Breton was a French-speaking Swiss), a German who "ket tronk efery day,"[34] sailors, backwoodsmen and others received this oft-patronizing treatment, but Irish dialects were most apt to be heard in the police courts of London, Boston, New York and even New Orleans of the Nineteenth Century. The Bow Street magistrate could not understand Phelim O'Callaghan when he testified of "dunkies," so Phelim repeated, "Dunkies...them are little bits of things--little bits of mules...as carries cabbages and purraters about."[35] And if Gill's reports lacked a Boston Irishman to lampoon, a Negro would do. "An Ethiopian worthy" or "a Morocco mistress," however, did not speak in the extravagant dialects of the Dutchman or Breton.

When a black man named Morris found his wife in the arms of a white man named Leggett, Gill set down the testimony of a "Colored Witness."

> I heard Morris sing out to his wife, and jist as he crossed from the window to the door, Leggett came out with this ere club in his vist, and said to Morris--"What do you want here?"[36]

The story ended with the court's observation that Leggett's debauched white witness could not be given the credibility of Morris's "respectable colored witness."

Physical description and dialect, though distinctive traits, were only part of a wider range of

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effects common to the vivid police court style. Gill, Corcoran and Wight delighted in colorful names--a pants-ripping watchdog called Tappoo Saib the Great,[37] Johan Vonhickenslaughter the Dutchman,[38] and a dirty-faced damsel known as Hannah Maria Juliana Shum.[39] They reveled in raucous scenes set in ordinary places--homes, streets, taverns, fields and offices.

The Bow Street and Boston reports are richer in picaresque action than in picturesque settings. Young John Saunders, in Bow Street for borrowing a horse, reminds modern readers of Fielding's Tom Jones or other troubled heroes of Eighteenth Century novels. With a large white band-box in one hand, an umbrella in the other, and his stomach lined with scotch ale, Saunders discovered a man struggling to remove a pebble from his horse's hoof. Helpful John "began grubbing away at the unlucky pebble with the spike of his umbrella" until it "borke off as short as a carrot."[40] Still helpful, John held the horse for its owner. Then, somehow, he mounted the horse and rode off at a full gallop,

> ...scampering away towards Kensington as if the deuce was in him--his umbrella tucked close under his arm, and his great white band-box banging about from side to side 'like mad,' as he said.
>
> Mr. Marchant stood aghast for a moment, and then followed, crying "Stop thief! Stop thief!" with all his might. Every horseman on the road, the horse patrol, and many foot passengers, hearing this cry, scampered after John Saunders... . --Tramp! tramp! away he went, through merry Kensington, down Phillimore Place, dashing by Holland House, and so away for Hammersmith, with a

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> continuously increasing rabble rout at his heels.
> ....
> ...he got so far ahead of his pursuers, that they could see nothing but his great white band-box--as it went bobbing and swinging from side to side at his back. Down Fulham-lane, however, they followed him, slap bang! --and on they went, halloing and hooting, through mud and mire, through fog and moonshine, till at last he took a desperate leap over the fence of a ploughed field.[41]

John Saunders not only escaped his pursuers, he escaped punishment by blaming the scotch ale for his mounting of the horse, and then blaming the horse for running away. It mitigated that he had already written an advertisement seeking the owner when Mr. Marchant found him. By the time Wight's story returned to the courtroom for final judgment in the case, his readers may have forgotten that what the writer called, "John Saunders on Horseback: A Narrative," was simply another item on the Bow Street docket.

When another defendant, Molly Lowe, came to Wight's attention, another literary model, Shakespearean comedy, tempted him away from legal formalities. As in the Saunders narrative, Molly's experience was literally treated as a story. Wight began, "There lives in the Strand...," and explicitly identified the fortyish Miss Lowe as the story's heroine.[42]

Molly was given a mock-dignified portrayal as a well-behaved woman, safe against anything "except superfine souchong with the least drop of brandy."[43] But the master of the house had learned, in a letter signed "Microscopicus," that "You will find Molly and

her moppet junketing together on the contents of your larder."[44] Indulging in exaggerated alliteration, Wight reported that the master trusted servant Molly and "was half-inclined to think Mr. Microscopicus was ...some meddling Methodistical miscreant." But his suspicions had been aroused by the charge that she was cavorting with a drummer boy.

> So, calling his shopmen together, he ascended with them to Molly Lowe's bed-room; and there, to Molly Lowe's confusion, he found the identical drummer stowed away, like Falstaff, in a buck-basket! There he lay--sword, cap, and belt, complete, coil'd up hilt to point, head to heel, in the bottom of the buck-basket, and covered over with a mountain of foul clothes! ... The buck-basket stood in a little closet, and they drew him forth from his--but "comparisons are odorous,"--it is enough, that they pulled him out, set him up on end, and shook him well.[45]

Molly, though "suffused with deep mahogany blushes," recovered quickly enough to claim the young man as a distant cousin.

Wight's court reports took similar narrative form even when the case required only a short, simple scene. In "The Rape of the Wig," with no apologies to Alexander Pope, the reporter for the London Herald showed how testimony of a modest crime could be narrated in a spurt of strong verbs. A preoccupied barrister walked slowly down a hall in Temple Bar, when Bob Jenkinson tried to pick his pocket. Bob "popped from his hiding place, crept...slided...and drew forth---a wig!"[46] Bob was so shocked at extracting a small "scratch" wig,

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that he stood transfixed and was captured. While confining the item to a few inches in length, Wight still transformed it from question-answer testimony to a narrative scene.

The Boston court provided comparable opportunities for moving freely from the courtroom to the scene of the crime. A lease dispute between Dr. Charles J. Houpt, dentist, and H.C. Currier, real estate broker, might sound like dull litigation. But Gill reported it as farce, climaxed by a picaresque chase. Currier allegedly planned to steal the lease; pretending "that he wanted his teeth sharpened," the broker entered the office while "Dr. Houpt was employed in setting a suite of porcelain grinders for a patient."[47]

Currier snatched the lease, slipped out the door, and "The doctor and Charles Thorne ran after him, and raised the hue and cry of 'Stop thief.'" Thorne caught him by the throat, grabbed back the lease, and kicked "Currier's rear rank" into the middle of the street. The broker ran again, but this time the watchdog, Tippoo Saib the Great, caught up with him.

> Tippoo forthwith served his process--not by a tap on the shoulder, but by making his teeth meet in the seat of his prisoner's breeches. The cloth of the breeches was not calculated to resist such an attack, and gave way, and thus gave liberty to their owner, and an airing to the skirt of his linen. As soon as he found himself disengaged from Tippoo's jaws, Currier flew--we say flew, because, when he lost a portion of his pants, he gained something which had much the appearance of wings--he flew out of sight, the

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> direction of his flight being veiled by the sable shades of night.[48]

If that consciously incongruous, mock-poetic exit from the slapstick scene were not enough, the narrative resumed with Currier returning to the dentist's office to apologize. This time, the unforgiving dentist grabbed the broker's leg, and Currier tumbled into the cellar before escaping once more, and then being captured again after a chase over three or four fences.[49]

The Boston reporter was as comfortable with heated dialogue and direct conflict as with physical description. When he completed that elaborate word portrait of Weevis and wife, he opened their headon battle. The wife got the worst of the testimony when sailor Weevis vowed that she cursed and swore viciously while he mildly repeated, "O hush!" and tried to kiss her--before finally swatting her with his leather strap.[50]

Gill seemed equally uninhibited when the climactic action involved lovemaking rather than violence. Before Morris, the "Ethiopian worthy," spied John Leggett embracing his wife, the reporter had developed a setting complete with dark alley, latticed window, raised sash and "the squeakings of a fiddle, that came creaking through the chinks of an adjacent hovel."[51] But Gill abandoned the restrained realism of the physical setting when he described the hugs and kisses of Mrs. Morris and her white suitor. After a preliminary kiss on

the forehead,

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> ...she desired to come to close quarters, and suddenly threw back her head, so as to bring her thick and pouting bussers, "and parts contiguous," within the reach of Leggett's mouth, and eyed him with a look of mingled love and pettishness, that seemed to say--"With another man my lips had been in danger." Johnny took the hint,and pounced.... To be plain, he kissed her--but O, such a kiss--it was a long kiss, a strong kiss, and a kiss altogether; --it was a suction-hose kiss, as if he would draw up by his breath a casket of jewels from the bottom of an unfathomable well.[52]

If the reader was not fully impressed with the kiss, Gill inserted three lines of Iago's description of Othello kissing Desdemona.

Broad, burlesquing treatment of police court cases obviously contained large measures of insensitive ridicule. Class prejudice, rather than narrowly racist or ethnic bias, dominated the reports, and reached all who, regardless of wealth and status, came before the court. The reporters portrayed "the other half," not to lift it from degradation to dignity, but to remind the reader of his good fortune in avoiding membership in "this disorderly part," as Wight put it.[53] To objections that his published collection of court stories "perpetuates ridicule and disgrace," Wight promised that many names had been disguised.[54]

But amidst the caricatures and stereotypes, the mocking laughter and abuse, there also ran a strain of sympathy and a thread of awareness of injustice. Corcoran's New Orleans was peopled with real criminals, but also with rather innocent drunks and homeless men

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who were continually rousted from their resting places by "Charley," the generic night watchman. Wight laughed at the manners of his countrymen, but without the scorn of the more pretentious essayists. And the Boston reporter, much as Ned Ward sympathized with a skeletal old debtor at Bridewell, complained that justice was not blind.

"Octavia Sylvester," Gill wrote, "had three powerful allies in her defense against a charge of stealing...--she was pretty, well dressed, and defended by J.C. Park."[55] He prefaced the story of one debtor's plight with a long general essay on "Severe Dunning."[56] His thesis: the greater the debt, the less the risk; the smaller the debt, the greater the punishment. But it took a "re-comer," a man named Joseph Hutchinson who had been sentenced and re-sentenced five times, to convert the writer fully from friendly mockery to pathos. Noting that Hutchinson would be punished more for having been punished before, Gill catalogued the discomforts of prison life, where the food was "monotonous as a tread-mill."

> (Meals) consist of but three simple elements--skilly, boiled beef, and bread, on one day, and bread, boiled beef, and skilly, the next. Their punishment consists of muteness, and marching and hammering by day, and sleeping alone at night. Their recreations are confined to praying and preaching on Sunday.[57]

The ultimate irony occurred when judges sentenced men to prison for the rest of their natural lives.

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"Natural lives!" Gill repeated, "Why, their 'natural lives' cease the moment they enter the precincts of the prison."[58]

If such budding conscience fell far short of the muckraking drive to expose corruption and remedy social evils, it did find "the other half" interesting and reportable. These early police reporters created models for varied literary treatment of formal courtroom sources; their freedom in reporting speech as dialect, in characterizing participants in news events, and in transforming testimony from question-answer interrogation into narrative scenes expanded the boundaries for future exposures. They supplied some of the raw ingredients for muckraking, and, most important, they advanced awareness that reporters would find their stylistic heritage in literature—not in the business ledger or the legal brief.

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13. A Treasury of Great Reporting, eds. Louis L. Snyder and Richard B. Morris (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 5.

14. Ibid., 8.

15. Ibid., 9.

16. Hughes, News and the Human Interest Story, 188.

17. The New England Palladium, cited by Frank Luther Mott, The News in America (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1952), 50-51. Mott asserted that early literature and newspapers "all resound with sensationalism," 49.

18. Willard S. Bleyer, Main Currents in the History of American Journalism (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1927), 172 (cited by Hughes, The News in America, 187-188.)

19. Pickings from the Picayune (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1846), 3.

20. John Wight, Mornings at Bow Street (London: Charles Baldwyn, 1824), iv. The volume collects items from the London Morning Herald of the three previous years.

21. Court Reports from the Boston Morning Post, from 1834 to 1837 (Boston: Otis, Broaders & Co., 1837), 73.

22. Wight, Mornings at Bow Street, 1.

23. Corcoran, The Other Half of New Orleans, ed. E. Merton Coulter (New Orleans: Louisiana State U. Press, 1939), 67. All subsequent Corcoran citations refer to this more accessible volume, which contains many items also printed in the 1846 Pickings. Editor Coulter, apparently unfamiliar with the earlier collection which names Corcoran as the reporter, speculated that George W. Kendall authored the sketches.

24. Ibid., 62, 86 and 21.

25. Ibid., 21.

26. Gill, Court Reports, 65.

27. Ibid., 205.

28. Ibid., 205.

29. Corcoran, 67-70.

30. Ibid., 22.

31. Gill, 210.

32. Wight, 73-75.

33. Ibid., 76.

34. Gill, 149.

35. Ibid., 217-218.

36. Ibid., 122-124.

37. Ibid., 189.

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38. Corcoran, 70.
39. Wight, 259.
40. Ibid., 187.
41. Ibid., 188-189.
42. Ibid., 199.
43. Ibid., 200.
44. Ibid., 201.
45. Ibid., 202.
46. Ibid., 211.
47. Gill, 187-189.
48. Ibid., 189-190.
49. Ibid., 190.
50. Ibid., 209210
51. Ibid., 122.
52. Ibid., 123.
53. Wight, iv.
54. Ibid., v.
55. Gill, 204.
56. Ibid., 19.
57. Ibid., 152.
58. Ibid.,